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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [PINS](#) [ECON](#) [MARR](#) [KE](#)

SUBJECT: MISERY LOVES COMPANY: DROUGHT AND CONFLICT IN MANDERA

REF: NAIROBI 1019

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Harsh drought conditions in Mandera district are having a devastating effect on livestock and their owners. While the deprivations of the drought have alleviated some of the causes of inter-clan conflicts in the area, the loss of livestock (and the income generated thereby) is resulting in the displacement of erstwhile herders which threatens to heighten tensions in the future. However, increasing educational opportunities may mitigate this problem in the longer-term by presenting viable alternatives to pastoral systems. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Poloff and Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) Civil Affairs Team-A615 Leader toured torrid, dusty Mandera District (estimated pop. 250,000), one of four districts in North Eastern Province, March 5-6. Mandera District is home to ethnic Somalis who are nomadic pastoralists or agro-pastoralists, and located at the intersection of Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya. The team visited Mandera Town, a hodgepodge collection of dusty concrete one-story structures and mud huts and the seat of the district government that borders Somalia and Ethiopia. They also traveled to the isolated town of Takaba, in Mandera West constituency, to dedicate a CJTF-HOA-funded school project.

In Desperate Need of Water

¶3. (SBU) North Eastern Province has received no significant rainfall for the past three years. The ensuing drought is taking its toll on both the environment and people of Mandera District. Water must be trucked into Mandera, but given the harsh road conditions throughout the district, water deliveries are few and far between. Shipments that do reach the population are insufficient to adequately meet its needs. Aid workers and government officials lament the frequent breakdowns of delivery vehicles due to deplorable road conditions. In Takaba, all water for the population of 10-20,000 is trucked in on abysmally poor roads from over 120 kilometers away, with each household receiving a meager Weekly ration of only 20 liters. (NOTE: 20 liters is the target Daily water ration for a single refugee in UNHCR camps, including the Dadaab camps in North Eastern Province. END NOTE.) The price for two liters of water in Mandera Town has risen from USD .70 several months before to over USD 1.40. More isolated areas of the district report dramatic price increases of up to 650 percent for water.

¶4. (SBU) The drought has devastated agriculture, inching the population toward the brink of famine. Food is scarce in Mandera. A tour of the local market in Mandera Town revealed little on offer, save for a few measly potatoes and onions. Locals report that practically all foodstuffs must be imported from other parts of Kenya. Action Against Hunger (AAH), a U.S. NGO that began a nutrition program in Mandera in 2004, has witnessed malnutrition levels soar in recent months. Their therapeutic and supplemental feeding centers were originally targeted to treat small children; however, recently they have begun to administer to increasing numbers of severely malnourished adults. AAH reports that food assistance lay abandoned by the roadside because people lack the water necessary to cook the food provided. AAH's nutrition programs officer reports rising malnutrition is causing greater vulnerability to disease: water-borne diseases are on the rise as desperate residents resort to drinking the only local water available, often roily and fetid, and some parts of the district are experiencing large-scale outbreaks of measles.

Loss of Livestock

¶5. (SBU) Pastures for livestock, the primary source of income for people in Mandera, have all but disappeared. Locals estimate 50-60 percent of all livestock have perished. The few emaciated goats and sheep observed in Mandera Town were seen foraging through piles of rubbish, with one animal scavenging a prize plastic bag of khat. Aid workers report that herdsmen are seeking pastures deep inside Ethiopia. Traditionally, the ethnic Somalis of Mandera keep vast herds, the only measure of their wealth. The drought has made it impossible to sustain these large herds. Local government

officials are urging the population to salvage what they can and devote scarce resources to a few animals, keeping them at home and feeding them available vegetation. However, given that herd numbers are their only source of wealth, few are embracing this message. In a desperate attempt to save their livestock, some owners are feeding food aid and nutrition supplements to their animals. Unfortunately, the animals are unable to digest the materials and subsequently die due to blockage. The bloated, festering carcass of a donkey littered the main street in Mandera Town.

¶6. (SBU) The loss of entire herds is resulting in growing numbers of &pastoralist drop-outs,⁸ posing significant challenges to the social structure and economy of the region. Those who have lost their herds to the drought are at a loss for alternatives to their way of life. These drop-outs could potentially pose risks to regional security in the future. Regardless of whether the rains arrive, Mandera officials recognize that long-term solutions are needed to address this significant challenge to the pastoralist communities and their livelihood systems. In conversations with poloff, however, it was clear that no such solutions were forthcoming.

Nothing Left to Fight Over

¶7. (SBU) The region is notorious for insecurity arising from inter-clan conflict within the ethnic Somali community, which often spills over into (or in from) neighboring Somalia and Ethiopia. According to the Mandera District Officer 1 (DO1), Mr. Galgalgo, and Major Charles Odour, Commander, B Company, 1st Kenyan Rifles, clan clashes primarily arise over competition for scarce resources. However, they report such conflicts are increasingly rare and they do not expect any trouble in the immediate future. Why? Because there is nothing left for clans to fight over. All clans are equally devastated by the drought and currently lack the energy to make war on their neighbors.

More Open Doors than Secure Borders

¶8. (SBU) As a border town, Mandera experiences a daily flow of Somalis crossing into Kenya through the official border, identifiable by the colorful array of plastic bags impaled on

the fencing. According to the Mandera border crossing Immigration Official, Joseph Mbuthia, most of the Somali movement into Mandera Town is foot traffic or donkey carts headed to the markets. Despite the drought, numerous carts filled with khat (mirrah) cluttered the main street in Mandera Town, illustrating one aspect of the brisk cross-border business. Mbuthia explained that to obtain visas, Somalis must write to the Immigration Department in Nairobi for permission prior to entering Kenya, a process few choose to follow. Poloff witnessed a small stream of people crossing in both directions, but did not witness any inspection process. (NOTE: The DOI had to call ahead to ensure an official was present at the border immigration office to receive poloff. END NOTE.) Mbuthia justified the lackluster inspections regime to poloff saying, "these people are all relatives so we cannot treat them disrespectfully."

¶9. (SBU) Nevertheless, security remains a concern. When queried about the strength of government security forces in the area, the DOI hinted at a large, interagency force and replied that it was enough8 to see to the security needs of the region. During a call on the Mandera Town Police Commissioner, Joshua Omukata (at his fortress-like headquarters), poloff was told not to be alarmed by the sounds of gunfire at night. Omukata explained that the gunshots would be coming from Somalia, which he dismissed as "a whole other country."

Expanding Educational Opportunities

¶10. (SBU) In Takaba, CJTF-HOA Chief of Staff Colonel Trafton, Captain Johnson, incoming CJTF-HOA Chief of Staff, Major Collier, and poloff attended the dedication ceremony of the completed CJTF-HOA Civil Affairs Takaba school project. Following the government's 2003 commitment to the provision of free primary education, the demand for secondary schooling has increased across Kenya. This CJTF project expanded the capacity of the only secondary school in Mandera West constituency (estimated population of 70-80,000.) The project

involved the construction of 4 additional classrooms, allowing the school to increase its capacity by 120 students, and the construction of an additional dormitory to allow students from throughout the constituency to enroll in school. The new classrooms will enable the school to enroll a second stream of students, eventually doubling the number of students. Despite the new airy facility, the accommodation still felt cramped, with several bunk-beds crammed into each of the new rooms. Civil Affairs projects such as this fuel the hopes of Mandera residents that the increasing number of boys receiving a secondary education will help ensure greater economic development for their communities. This may even serve to provide alternatives to the questionably sustainable pastoral way of life.

¶11. (SBU) Conspicuously absent in all of the gracious expressions of gratitude and pleas for future assistance to the school was any mention of the plight of Mandera West's girls. Women themselves were scarce at the ceremony, though three were represented on the school's board off governors. Girls were singularly absent from among the throngs of young boys gathered to observe the event. There is no secondary school for girls in the entire constituency. Mandera West's District Officer, C.S. Siele, appealed for USG assistance in providing access to secondary education for girls. If left to their own devices, he said, community leaders would never contribute the necessary funds to establish a school for the female population.

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: While in the short term, the deprivations of drought are having an ameliorating effect on tensions in this historically volatile region, their effects will cause a lasting disruption to the traditional way of life for people of Mandera. There is rising resentment of those wealthy enough to purchase livestock from their poorer neighbors, who are forced to sell at far below market prices. This, coupled with the loss of income for many and disputes over the distribution of assistance, may pose significant challenges

to stability and security in the region in the future. END
COMMENT.
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